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ABSTRACT

Teacher duties and curriculum developed by North Dakota, in deciding what role teachers would play in the community and what standards of conformity and propriety would be applied to teachers, mirrored certain aspects of the local culture and reflected a wider national culture. The inclusion of health studies reflected the local majority concern about the use and abuse of alcohol and other narcotics. The teacher was obligated to keep a Teacher's Register which contained the teacher's lesson plans, student records, and a visitor's log, among other things. A number of restrictions were placed on teachers' private lives by the communities which hired them. In general, women teachers received lower salaries than men. The extent of the difference was often determined by the attitude of the ethnic community in which the teachers worked. Teachers also subsidized education, especially during the Depression, by accepting warrants (promises by a school board to pay a stated amount when money became available): they often had to wait for some of their salary even if money was available. Teachers were required to "up-grade" their academic training by attending Teacher's Institutes. Sometimes, salaries were affected by how many additional tasks the teacher was willing to perform, especially janitorial work. (Author/CM)

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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY:

Humanities on the Frontier

NORTH DAKOTA'S COUNTRY TEACHERS:

THEIR ROLES, RULES, AND RESTRICTIONS

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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: HUMANITIES ON THE FRONTIER

The Mountain Plains Library Association is pleased to be involved in this project documenting the country school experience. Funding of this project from the National Endowment for the Humanities, cost sharing and other contributions enabled us all to work with the several state-based Humanities Committees as well as many other state and local libraries, agencies and interested citizens. We are deeply impressed not only by the enthusiasm for this work by all concerned but by the wealth of experience brought to bear in focusing attention on—and recapturing—this important part of history, and how we got here. This project seems to identify many of the roots and "character formation" of our social, political and economic institutions in the West.

Already the main Project objective seems to be met, stimulating library usage and increasing circulation of historical and humanities materials in this region. Public interest is rising in regional, state and local history. Oral history programs are increasing with greater public participation. The study of genealogy—and the search for this information—is causing much interest in consulting—and preserving—historical materials. What has been started here will not end with this project. The immediate results will tour the entire region and be available for any who wish the program, film, and exhibit. There will be more discussion of--and action on—the issues involving the humanities and public policies, past and present. The Mountain Plains Library Association is proud to be a partner in this work, the Country School Legacy, and its contribution to understanding humanities on the frontier.

Joseph J. Anderson
Nevada State Librarian
Past President
Mountain Plains Library Association

Teachers: Their Roles, Rules, and Restrictions

Several years ago, Robin M. Williams, Jr. declared that

> . . . teachers are often held to special standards of conformity and propriety; for there has been a close historic association between school and church in this country; and the latent social functions of the school are, in fact, similar in several respects to those of religious organizations. Willy-nilly the educator deals with values; he has exceptional opportunity to examine the unexamined axioms of the culture and interpret its crucial but vulnerable symbols. Since society is so largely equivalent to consensus, those who deal with values and beliefs as part of their occupational role--ministers, judges, writers, some artists, social scientists, teachers--touch upon the sensitive fringes of social order. In part for this reason, persons who deal with the beliefs and values that the community feels basic to its existence are the object of special surveillance and concern.

Since education was not specifically delegated to the Federal government by the Constitution, it fell among the powers reserved to the states to decide what role teachers would play in the community and what "special standards of conformity and propriety" would be applied to teachers. Some two decades after statehood, North Dakota had developed a fairly elaborate set of "Duties of Teachers" which not only mirrored certain aspects of the local culture but also reflected a wider national culture.

In 1911 the State demanded, through its adopted curriculum, that the teacher give students a common set of ideas, beliefs, values, and skills. The core curriculum consisted of orthography, reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, language lessons, English grammar, geography, United States history, civil government, physiology and hygiene. All the subjects reflected the national culture, but the inclusion of health studies reflected the local majority concern about the use and abuse of alcohol and "other narcotics." Prohibiton, a thorn in the side of the body politic for years, was, in 1889, approved by a narrow margin--18,552 to 17,393. In 1911, teahcers were directed to give

> . . . special instruction concerning the nature of alcoholic drinks and other narcotics and their effect upon the human system shall be taught as thoroughly as any branch is taught. All pupils in the above mentioned schools below the high school and above the third year of school work, computing from the beginning of the lowest primary year, shall receive instruction in this subject every year from text books adapted to grade in the hands of pupils for not less than four Lessons per week for ten weeks of each school year.

The lower three primary grades were to be instructed orally in the subject ". . . not less than three lessons per week for ten weeks of each school year."

A teacher's certificate could be revoked for failure to give this instruction. It could also be revoked for incompetency, immorality, intemperance, cruelty, crime, breach of contract, refusal to perform duty, and general neglect of the business of the school.

The State took responsibility to determine what the teacher taught and what the student learned, what content, intended and unintended was given to the young citizens of the state. The "business of the school" and the duty of the teacher was more than simply teaching the course of study. In 1915, State Superintendent of Public Instruction E.J. Taylor suggested to teachers that "the course of study is not intented to act as a fetter, but to aid in pointing out the material and grouping the work and suggesting method." But then he declared "the Teacher must master it."

The teacher was also obligated to master and keep the Teacher's Register, certainly one of the more burdensome tasks of country school teachers. The Course of Study and the Teacher's Register provided an almost minute by minute account of a school's daily plan for what should happen and of what actually took place in that school on a given day. The Register contained the teacher's daily program, monthly review records, final examination records and student classification, a visitor's log, a record of visits by the county superintendent, and an extremely detailed account of student attendance and punctuality. The attention paid to punctuality reflected a national pride in the virtue, as expressed in the Horatio Alger stories with their many references to the virtue of employees showing up every day on time.

To keep the Register in a satisfactory manner, the teacher had to "master" the following set of instructions:

> In marking attendance place month and day of month over appropriate columns. Opposite "a.m." and "p.m." record the attendance and tardiness of each half day respectively. Enter E in proper place to designate when pupil entered school and L to designate the time when pupil left school. If pupil is present at roll call, leave the space blank. If absent, draw a vertidalor slanting line (/). If pupil is tardy and enters after roll call, draw a horizontal line across top of vertical or slanting line. T to represent tardy. If a pupil is absent for five or more consecutive days, he should be marked L (left) on the day on which the absence began and E (Entered) on the day on which he returns. Draw a horizontal line (-) through all the spaces from the beginning of a term of school until a pupil enters school and from the time of leaving school until re-entering, or until the close of the term, as the case may be. These days so marked by a horizontal line are designated "days of non-membership." The days marked by the vertical lines are designated"days of absence," and the days left blank are designated "days present" or "days of attendance." All totals should be carried out in "Summary." The formula given at foot of Attendance page furnishes all information needed in making up "Sum-

mary." If a term should exceed four months, enter pupils' names on every other or on every third page.

Teachers also had to submit an acceptable final report at the end of the term under the threat of forfeiting their last month's wages if they failed to do so.

By 1915, country school teachers were subject to many other rules and regulations. In that year, teachers had to give notice to the country superintendent of the time and place of the opening of school, had to hold a valid certificate or permit or forfeit wages, and had to display the flag on the school house in seasonable weather. Teachers were also given the right in 1915, if notice were sent to parents or guardians and some member of the school board, to suspend pupils for as long as five days for insubordination or habitual disobedience.

For the most part, the duties of country school teachers were spelled out by state law. Their roles were affected by other factors. For example, their wage and salary levels were always low in comparison with other professions. In general, women teachers received lower salaries than men. But the extent of the difference was often determined by the attitude of the ethnic community in which the teachers worked. Consider the evidence below (Logan County was settled mainly by Germans from Russia, Grand Forks County by Norwegians):

Average Monthly Salaries of Public School Teachers In North Dakota: 1894-1952
Comparison of Male and Female Salaries

	1894		1906		1918		1926		1936		1946		1952	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Grand Forks	45.00	39.50	69.83	44.63	114.25	64.50	190.94	132.97	143.22	91.92	266.02	162.51	383.81	276.69
Logan	36.58	32.93	36.76	36.64	49.39	47.47	96.10	90.49	64.12	49.09	147.63	123.30	238.17	183.86

In general, the Germans from Russia paid the teacher less than did the Norwegians, but the Germans from Russia paid the teachers more equally low salaries, especially during the years 1906 through 1930. The table is also an accurate barometer of economic conditions: while both counties lowered salaries during the Great Depression, Logan County was much harder hit than Grand Forks in the Red River Valley where some rains came.

Teachers also subsidized education in North Dakota, most commonly, and especially during the Depression, by accepting warrants--promises by a school board to pay a stated amount when money became available. In many cases, teachers were forced, in order to live, to sell their warrants for as little as 90 cents on the dollar.

If one could "hold on," warrants were eventually redeemed for face value. In 1933, Ruth Jacobson who taught School Number 3, Plainview School District 31, Benson County agreed ". . . that she shall hold some of her warrants for a reasonable time if lack of funds make it necessary to require it." Two years later Irene Anderson and the Kennison School District in LaMoure County signed a contract agreeing that "In case school funds are depleted she agrees to wait for salary or accept Certificate of Indebtedness." The same year World War II broke out in Europe Clara Haakenstad who was teaching in Bottineau County agreed ". . . to accept registered warrants if the district is unable to provide the cash."

Teachers often had to wait for some of their salary even if money was available. Some boards were reluctant to pay the teacher the full monthly contracted salary until they determined if the teacher would "work out"--in 1934, for example, Grace Sheppard was teaching for $45/month in McIntosh County. Her contract "further provided" that ". . . the clerk shall retain 10% of the salary until mutual termination or expiration of this contract." Bernice Whitney who taught for $55/month in 1937 in Stutsman County accepted a similar provision in her contract--"10% of teachers wages will be retained to be paid when teacher has completed her term." In 1920 Leonard Cox was teaching a nine-month term in Nelson School District in McLean County for $125/month. He agreed that "Salary to be paid on 12-month basis. 10th and 11th month pay to be given with the ninth, reserving 12th until teacher returns in the fall."

Teachers were required to "up-grade" their academic training by attending Teacher's Institutes. By 1921 salaries were tied to academic training:

(1) the minimum wage for a teacher with less than four years of high school training was set at $80/month

(2) high school graduates were to receive not less than $90/month

(3) graduates of normal school courses of one year beyond the four-year high school were to receive not less than $111.11

(4) two-year normal school graduates would receive $122.22

(5) three-years of normal school would demand $133.33

(6) a graduate of a four-year program should receive at least $144.44.

Salaries were also to be increased over these minimums at the rate of $50/year for five years.

Sometimes, salaries were affected by how many additional tasks the teacher was willing to perform, especially doing janitorial work. In 1915, Leonard B. Cox was

hired by the Freitag School District 65 in McLean County to teach and serve as janitor for $60/month. When he taught at the Regan School District in Burleigh County in 1934 he taught for $70/month plus "free house and fuel" and was paid an additional $10/month to do the "janitorial work." As the Depression deepened, Cox received less; in 1936 he signed a contract with the Estherville School District in the same county for $60/month, no "free house and fuel," and no extra pay to be the janitor. By 1940, at his school in Oliver County (School #1 in Butte School District), he was earning $75/month plus ". . . free fuel and use of the teacherage" for serving as the janitor.

In 1938, Bernice Whitney's school board, Sidney School District #55, Stutsman County, paid her $60/month for teaching and doing the janitorial work, with the written stipulation that "fire to be started by 8 A.M."

Clara Haakenstad agreed to do all ". . . janitor work and necessary cleaning" for the Eidsvold School District in Bottineau County in 1939 for $65/month. At a neighboring school a year earlier, she taught for $65 and agreed to ". . . do all janitor work including scrubbing school house floors at least once a month."

In 1943 Julia Hurinenko was teaching School #2 in Badland School District #14 in Dunn County for $115/month. Her additional duties included "Fires started and school house warm by 8:45 A.M. Floors scrubbed once each month or $2.50 will be deducted. Toilets kept sanitary."

Teachers who remember their "janitorial work" have enjoyed the description of Valborg Fisher, who began her teaching career in a one-room school in Morton County in 1925, as she wrote for <u>In Retrospect</u>:

"How can I forget the floor!"

> At that time I was expected to do all janitor work, so the floor stands out in my memory. It was a black splintered floor, full of slivers and dirty grease. I swept it with a straight broom. When it was scrubbed it absorbed all the water.
>
> The next floor showed some improvement in that it was dark brown with fewer slivers. It had been oiled during the summer. I was still using a straight broom.
>
> Then the floor improved to a sliverless, light brown varnish; a sweeping compound could be used with a push broom, but oily spots would show if the compound wasn't removed quickly.
>
> Later someone had the idea of painting this floor. That made for easier cleaning, but by spring it looked horrible because the paint had worn off in so many places.
>
> Tile on a cement foundation was really an improvement. Now the children could sit on the floor, and best found their places in library corners,

reading nooks and special places. These could be washed if necessary.

Today, we find schoolrooms with wall to wall carpeting. Huge vacuum cleaners do the work that I had to do under trying conditions after putting in a full day of teaching.

Teachers might also remember incidents similar to the one related by Harvey M. Sletten of Ft. Ransom who remembers almost not being rehired because, as the farmer with whom he boarded put it, "The board reckons as how yer a fair to middlin' teacher, but you've burned jest too derned much coal this winter."

Sletten reported "A tinge of bitterness creeping through shocked disbelief. My school stood on a hill--utterly naked and exposed to frigid winds."

The farmer admitted that "The younguns have all learned to read tolerably well, but you've burned jest too dern much coal this winter. That buildin' of your'n is as drafty as long-handled underwear with the trap door down. It always takes some more coal, but nothin' like you burned up."

But the farmer liked Harvey, so he did a little investigating in Paradise School District in Eddy County that spring of 1933. Both he and Harvey were happy when the farmer could come in one day and announce, "Well yer hired back! Seems as how the feller that hauled coal to yer school got a mite light fingered. Part of each load went into his own coal shed at home."

Country school teachers won't forget the floor, the problems with the stove, and the restriction on their social life. Many teachers were the object of what Williams calls "special surveillance." Hilda Ellingson remembers In Retrospect:

> When I became a teacher, it was an idealistic type of work. Teachers were respected; we commanded respect from the pupils as well as from people in the community. Certainly, what we did, with whom we associated, what we wore, what we said and how we taught were common topics of conversation, both constructive and destructive, in any community.
>
> At this time the success of a teacher was determined by how well she could heat the school room with the damp lignite coal afforded her; how many pupils passed The State Board Examinations and how well she disciplined. Her conduct in the community was another thing that was well weighed. No drinking, not smoking was the rule; and her associates were approved or disapproved. We were expected to join the Homemaker's Club, to attend the nearest church, even though it might not be of our own denomination, to sing in the choir, teach Sunday School, coach or take part in home talent plays and be a participant in any other activity that might arise. No one thought of going home weekends, something we had learned from a college professor, who termed such teachers "suitcase teachers," and heaven forbid that we should be labeled such, for that was litte [sic] short of a plague.

Vera Daniels, who taught School Number 2 in Finn School District 11 in Logan County in 1937 for $50/month agreed to "Stay away from dances parties etc during school days." Irene Anderson who taught School Number 3 in Kennison School District, LaMoure County in 1935 for $60/month not only had to "refrain from midweek dancing parties . . ." but also had ". . . to be at her residing place by 11 o'clock P.M." Grace Sheppard who taught School Number 2 in Willowbank School District Number 2 in the same county two years later was granted ". . . one night out in the school week for social pleasures." Her salary was $60/month. Elsie Maurer's contract from Superior School District 19 in Eddy County in 1930 paid her $90/month, however there was ". . . no dancing allowed in said school."

Some school districts forbade teachers from marrying during their term of employment. In 1938, in Ramsey Cunty, Lake School District 5 paid Cora Aasmunstad $65/month for a nine-month teaching term. The board was willing to pay her $5.00 per month additonal for janitorial services but was reluctant to see her get married. Her contract declared "that marriage violates this contract and the board reserves the right to discontinue this agreement, . . ." The board which managed School Number 4 in Lippert School District 54 in Stutsman County was more rigid. Bernice Whitney taught there in 1939 for $70/month, but her contract declared that "if teacher marries during school year her contract becomes void." The board which hired Edna Edinger to teach in School Number 3 in Greatstone School District Number 52, McLean County, was like-minded, declaring "that this contract is void if said teacher marries during term."

If these teacher rules and regulations seem unreasonable or immoderate in 1981, the following gleaned from the files of the Barnes County archives might seem somewhat excessive: "The Board requires that at least half of the weekends must be spent in this town." "This contract not subject to cancellation." "Contract for an indefinite term but not to exceed 9 months." "He shall share a room at the teacherage with the other man teacher." [In female contract] "Contract to be renewed each month." "Teacher to open school with prayer and Bible reading each morning at least 10 minutes, . . ."

If Robin W. Williams, Jr. is right when he says that ". . . persons who deal with the beliefs and values that the community feels basic to its existence are the object of special surveillance and concern," country school teachers would have done well to adopt Marion White Currier's

COMMANDMENTS OF THE COUNTRY TEACHER

Thou shalt adopt this country school,
Here with nature, quiet and bleak;

Inside some gloom and musty books,
A spell of loneliness and mystique.

Thou shalt keep a tidy room
All janitorial duties to perform:
Sweep the floor, clean boards and dust,
Fire up and keep it comfortably warm.

Thou shalt devote and dedicate.
You're a teacher, a social symbol high.
Be satisfied with modest bed and board,
Though for salary, you almost cry.

Thou shalt instruct every single child
To read, to spell and do arithmetic;
Some oral, some written and some outlined.
Flash cards could almost do the trick.

Thou shalt discipline very wisely.
Promote and master basic skills.
Use ingenuity, with determination too,
For leadership with a satisfied will.

Thou shalt glide softly about the room.
Remember the contract and the code.
Every child should work and share,
Doing his portion of the load.

Thou shalt pray for heroic courage
To always abide by the Golden Rule;
The gratitude of work is salvation,
A tribute to the Country School,
That slowly passed away.